

## **Bipartisan Legislation Introduced in Congress to Crack Down on Animal Fighting Spectators**

### ***The Humane Society of the United States Commends Reps. Marino and Sutton for Bill to Penalize Criminals who Finance and Bring Children to Dogfights and Cockfights***

WASHINGTON (July 12, 2011) -- The Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society Legislative Fund applaud U.S. Reps. Tom Marino, R-Pa., and Betty Sutton, D-Ohio, for introducing bipartisan federal legislation, H.R. 2492, that would prohibit knowing attendance at organized animal fights and impose additional penalties for causing a minor to attend such events. Over the past decade, Congress has strengthened the penalties for and closed major loopholes in the federal animal fighting law, but has left the issue of spectators unaddressed. The Marino-Sutton bill will correct this remaining gap in federal law to allow for a more comprehensive crackdown on this barbaric activity.

“Spectators are participants and accomplices who enable the crime of animal fighting, provide a large share of the funding for the criminal enterprise through their admission fees and gambling wagers, and help conceal handlers and organizers who try to blend into the crowd when a bust occurs,” said Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of The HSUS. “We are grateful to Representatives Marino and Sutton for introducing this legislation. We call on Congress to swiftly pass it and give law enforcement the tools they need to crack down on the entire cast of characters involved in animal fighting.”

Animal fighting is an inhumane and cruel activity involving the deliberate pitting of animals against each other to fight, often for lengthy contests that end in death, for the sole purpose of gambling and entertainment of spectators. Animals used for fighting are often drugged to heighten their aggression and forced to keep fighting even after they’ve suffered grievous injuries such as broken bones, deep gashes, punctured lungs, and pierced eyes. Young children are often brought to these events and exposed to the gruesome spectacle as acceptable entertainment.

“As a former state and federal prosecutor, I’ve seen first-hand the criminal culture that surrounds animal fighting events and the damaging influence this environment has on our children,” said Rep. Marino. “We try to protect our kids from criminal violence and yet there is no safeguard for those adults who take impressionable children to animal fights where they can witness these heinous acts in person. I introduced this legislation to make sure that law enforcement has all of the tools necessary to deprive the organizers and profiteers of these horrific events from receiving the support they need to continue this activity.”

“Animal fighting is a horrible and barbaric activity, and by making it a federal crime for individuals to knowingly attend these events or bring minors to them, we will make tremendous strides in putting an end to it once and for all,” said Rep. Sutton. “I am proud to stand with Members from both sides of the aisle and look forward to passing this common-sense, humane legislation.”

It is illegal in 49 states to be a knowing spectator at an animal fight. A majority – 28 states – impose felony-level penalties on spectators. The Marino-Sutton bill imposes federal misdemeanor penalties for knowing attendance and felony penalties for causing a minor to attend. State and federal law enforcement agencies often work together to enforce animal fighting laws, and the federal law will complement the state laws on animal fighting spectators.

The law would not reach to individuals who are not aware they are present at an animal fight or situations where two animals fight without provocation by animal fighting organizers. Because organized animal fighting is a federal crime and illegal in all 50 states, this activity is highly clandestine. Spectators at animal fights don't just accidentally happen upon a fight – they seek out the criminal activity at secret locations, often need passwords to enter, and pay hefty admission fees for the opportunity to watch and gamble on the fights – facts that a prosecutor might use as evidence to prove that a defendant knowingly attended.

#### **Facts:**

- Spectators pay hundreds or thousands of dollars in admission fees and gambling bets, generating the bulk of the revenue for this illegal enterprise. The fights would not occur without the crowd betting on the outcome and enjoying the bloodletting.
- Spectators provide cover for animal fighters, who weave into crowds to evade prosecution at the first sign of a police raid.
- Often spectators are themselves participants in animal fights, waiting their turn at a typical organized animal fight, with several rounds during an event or derby. When police raid an animal fight, it is extremely difficult to differentiate between spectators and participants who were going to fight their dog or bird in the next match.
- Cockfighting has been linked to the death of a number of people in Asia from bird flu and to an outbreak of a poultry disease that cost U.S. taxpayers more than \$200 million to contain.
- Animal fighting is also closely associated with other criminal activities such as gangs, narcotics, illegal weapons possession, public corruption and various violent crimes. A three-year study by the Chicago Police Department found that 70 percent of animal offenders had also been arrested for other felonies, including domestic and aggravated battery, illegal drug trafficking and sex crimes.

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*The Humane Society of the United States is the nation's largest animal protection organization – backed by 11 million Americans, or one of every 28. For more than a half-century, The HSUS has been fighting for the protection of all animals through advocacy, education and hands-on programs. Celebrating animals and confronting cruelty -- On the web at [humanesociety.org](http://humanesociety.org).*

*The Humane Society Legislative Fund is a social welfare organization incorporated under section 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code and formed in 2004 as a separate lobbying affiliate of The Humane Society of the United States. The HSLF works to pass animal protection laws at the state and federal level, to educate the public about animal protection issues and to support humane candidates for office. On the Web at [hslf.org](http://hslf.org).*

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